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ABSTRACT

This paper provides suggestions to alleviate the tension, fear, and frustration which may accompany parent-teacher conferences, in order to make them more effective. Tips for parents and tips for teachers are both presented in a checklist format. The tips focus on three typical areas of concern--planning, implementation, and evaluating the conference. Examples of tips for parents include: (1) identify specific questions that need to be answered; (2) keep the child's welfare central to the conference; and (3) summarize and document what was discussed and planned. Examples of tips for the teacher include: (1) determine the purpose of the conference; (2) greet the parent(s) at the door using his or her (teacher's) first name; and (3) keep lines of communication open. (RJC)

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# MAKING THE MOST OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES:

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

Gregory E. Bell

For many parents having to attend parent-teacher conferences scheduled once or twice a year are times of tension, fear, frustration, and anxieties. Parents are afraid that they will hear unpleasant things about their child. They are afraid that they won't know what questions to ask and will ask dumb questions. They are afraid that the teacher will verbally attack them or their child, or they are frustrated because the time is so short that they can't get answers to all their questions and therefore problems remain unaddressed.

Although a certain amount of apprehension is natural, parents can reduce their anxiety by recognizing that teachers are also anxious about talking to parents. And parents may find that if they plan in advance for the meetings and follow-up on suggestions made there, conferences can be opportunities to develop parent-teacher partnerships that help children do their best in school. The following ideas are suggestions to use to make conferences more effective.

### PLANNING

- Discuss the purpose of the conference with the teacher and your child.
- Make sure arrangements have been made related to the place, date and time alloted for the conference.
- Identify specific questions that you need answered.
- Keep a file of child's work.
- Be aware of child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Review report card, if available.
- Review any correspondence forwarded to you from the teacher.
- Make an effort for primary guardian(s) to attend the conference.

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## IMPLEMENTING

- Arrive on time.
- Keep the child's welfare central to the conference.
- Convey mutuality of interest.
- Keep an open mind.
- Avoid confrontations.
- Be observant and recognize that the conference is a two-way experience.
- Respect the teacher's input.
- Allow the teacher to share concerns without interruptions, rather than attempting to respond as issues are raised.
- Present questions or prepared agenda.
- Encourage the teacher to present the positive as well as the constructive criticisms about the child.
- Listen carefully to the teacher and take cues from concerns presented.
- Be perceptive to behavior of teacher, noting signs of anxiety, restlessness, and irritation.
- Pause once in a while.
- Document your comments as well as the teacher.
- Summarize key ideas presented by you and the teacher.
- Show and share notes taken.
- Give suggestions for improvement.
- Create a parent-teacher plan to pursue to benefit the child.
- Try to present and respond to concerns before the conference ends.
- Schedule another conference if needed.

## EVALUATING

- Review the conference minutes with accompanying notes, comments, and materials.
- Summarize and document what was discussed and planned.
- Establish a timeline for completing the planned resolutions and follow-up activities. Include notes collected and new priorities or needs identified during the conference by you and the teacher.
- Mark calendar of additional duties.
- Discuss the conference with child.
- Give positive comments to your child about the conference.
- Give remarks that make your child feel unique and special.
- Implement suggested changes and resolutions.
- Send personalized notes to teacher. Teacher needs to feel appreciated.
- Thank teacher for the time shared together.
- Update the teacher of child's progress at home.
- If possible, telephone the teacher and discuss child's progress at home and in school.
- Continue to pursue an open line of communication with the teacher, because it takes a team effort.
- Remember communication is a process.

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MAKING THE MOST OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES:
TIPS FOR TEACHERS

For many teachers, parent-teacher conferences scheduled once or twice a year can be times of tension, fear, frustration, and anxieties. The process of communicating with parents is a very essential component of being an effective teacher. Recent research in the area of teacher education-development has revealed that an effective teacher should exhibit competence in human relations and planning skills.

Since parent-teacher conferences is an expected and necessary event during the school year, what can teachers do to make this process more effective? The following ideas are suggestions obtained from interviewing teachers who have participated in numerous parent-teacher conferences. The checklist format is utilized to provide emphasis in the three typical areas of concern for most teachers: planning, implementing, and evaluation.

**PLANNING THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE**

- Determine the purpose of the conference.
- Notify the parent(s) about the purpose, place, date, and the length of time alloted for the conference.
- Ask parent(s) if there are any particular concerns that they may have to be addressed.
- Explain to the child what the conference will cover.
- Collect samples of child's work.
- Review the child's school file.

**IMPLEMENTING THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE**

- Greet the parent(s) with your first name at the door.
- Seat the parent(s) at the same level as yourself.
- Explain the purpose of the conference.
- Give the time limitations.

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- Inform parent(s) that you are taking notes.
- Offer parent(s) paper and pencil to do the same.
- Begin the conference on time with a friendly comment.
- Request questions or prepared agenda.
- Keep an open-mind.
- Avoid confrontations.
- Conduct the conference in a straight forward and honest manner.
- Keep the child's welfare central to the conference.
- Convey mutuality of interest.
- Encourage the parent(s) to present the positive as well as the constructive criticism.
- Be observant and recognize that the conference is a two-way experience.
- Request parent's input.
- Allow parent(s) to share concerns without interruptions, rather than attempting to respond as issues are raised.
- Listen carefully to parents and take cues from concerns presented.
- Be perceptive to behavior of parents, noting signs of anxiety, restlessness, and irritation.
- Pause once in a while.
- Document your comments as well as the parent(s).
- Summarize key ideas presented by the parent(s) and yourself.
- Show and share notes taken.
- Give suggestions for improvement.
- Create a teacher-parent plan to pursue to benefit the child.
- Schedule another conference if needed.
- End the conference on time.

**EVALUATING THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE**

- Review the conference minutes with accompanying notes, comments, and materials.
- Summarize and document what was discussed and planned.
- Establish a timeline for completing the planned resolutions and follow-up activities. Include notes collected on new priorities or needs identified during the conference by either parent(s) or teacher.
- Mark calendar of additional duties.
- Give positive comments to each child about the conference.
- Give remarks that make the child feel unique and special.
- Send personalized notes to the parent(s). Parents need to feel appreciated.
- Thank parents for their time.
- If possible, telephone parents(s) and discuss child's progress at home and in school.
- Keep lines of communication open.
- Remember communication is a process!

Hopefully the end result of open-communication with parents will enable teachers to provide children with a balanced and healthy learning environment which is developmentally appropriate.

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